

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

57 Hartford Street San Francisco, California 94114 Telephone: 415/863-2507

Newsletter

July/August/September 1989

The following lecture was given by Maitri Hospice Director Kijun-Steve Allen one Sunday at HSZC.

Good morning. Today I'd like to speak to you about why we have forms of practice--why our zen practice is different from Vajrayana or Christian practice.

The depth of our existence is very broad, deep and wide. We're responsive to our environment in countless ways that we don't understand, and yet we need to care for the world in which we find ourselves. That world is distinct and particular. We find it difficult to respond to things we can't see, feel or perceive directly in some way, but naturally we just do things--we respond to our environment. So of course what's in that environment becomes a big factor in who we become. We are pulled into activities, ways of thinking and relating to people, but we aren't very clear why we are pulled. We're aware that it's not completely in our control.

Buddhist teaching allows us to shift this misunderstanding that we are controlled from the outside. It's a tool for reshaping our understanding. Teachings are ways of orienting us to practices, and through these actual practices our life can be transformed. This transformation emerges from our own center and we find we can exist in the world without being pulled in any direction. For each one of us it's a very particular unfolding. There's no one who can do it for us--no one we can turn it over to. So relationships have interdependence and independence. So every aspect of our existence is interrelated and fused with our environment and every moment we are independent.

Without the forms of our practice we couldn't embody this paradox. Usually we are split apart, wanting to act out of an independence that ignores interdependence. But in zen practice both options are taken away from us--challenging our ability to accept the paradox at the core of each moment. Practice allows us to reside in a place that is simultaneously dependent and independent--but it is a place we can't grasp or hold on to. It doesn't fall into the framework of our conceptual mind. So



we need a practice that allows us to have an actual experience of this. It is a practice grounded in our own breath, but to experience it we have to take off the mask of our identity. But to take off the mask of our identity we must face our fears of death. So when we come to sit zazen we come to sit entirely with ourselves, but unfortunately we don't know ourselves. If we make the mistake of thinking our self is the identity given us by our parents and society and refined by our desires, we become afraid of death. And the more we try to let go of this identity the more fear of death arises in us.

Without the stability of sitting practice we would not be able to stay with ourselves at our deepest level of being present: interdependent and independent. If we are wearing our social mask we are caught in dualistic understanding. Though dualistic understanding isn't going away, our identity with it, our being pressed by it can go away. Then you can pick it up, use it and put it away as we need. When we don't have enough concentration, wisdom or compassion to stay completely present we are haunted. If we turn towards the past we call it a ghost; if we turn towards the future we call it death. It's a reflex action of not being present. If we are present, death disappears but being present with compassion and wisdom is not something we can control. If we try to control it we lose it--because it is alive it eludes our grasp.

So we have a dilemma: we have to recreate Buddhism, because it doesn't happen in some abstract place. It happens right here in each of us--and there is no time for us to rest in our assumptions of what it is. To practice we have to keep examining ourselves from within the particular framework handed down to us by the tradition. But for me, the beauty of Buddhist teaching is that it is a framework that doesn't tie us down. It's not dependent on the past. It's a succession of teachings. Each generation recreates it. It's been going on for 2,500 years. But unless we're careful, it can become a tremendous burden to us. If we think it's only in scripture, we lose our own voice. We lose the capability of recreating it. Each canon arose out of particular people practicing together at particular places and particular times. Our task is the same as theirs: how do we make this teaching accessible to ourselves and to other people?

So our first task is how to make the teaching accessible to ourselves. We must take the teaching inside ourselves and question how to make Buddhism completely accessible to *this* person, and through this person to society and to the questions and demands of *this* time. We must be open at all levels. If we can do this, we can completely recreate and transform society. Unfortunately we have lost the tools to do this; and we have even forgotten that it is possible.

But in Buddhist practice we can create an environment that allows independence and interdependence simultaneously. We come together and allow it to work. It's difficult to sit with others. It's difficult to sit with others and feel alone. In the uniqueness of zazen we have an opportunity to uncover ourselves and develop that network of wisdom and compassion that can radiate out from our practice. We need this opportunity to encounter ourselves and our sangha (the community of people who support the practice). That opportunity is a great gift to us from the past, but unless we actually do it--practice, insight, wisdom, and imperturbability will be eroded away and die. If we allow this erosion, we diminish our lives.

We find we live in a poisoned world and sometimes we feel that our only inheritance is sickness, old age and death. So it's very important to maintain our practice (and my practice is continually to find a way to make that clear to myself and to you) to encourage our effort to recreate our lives in a way that doesn't ignore the paradox. We need to encourage each other not to give up hope, not to give ourselves over to the cynicism of our times and if we expect to find the answer out there, we *will* be swept away by that cynicism. Don't look for the solution in the contours of your mask or my mask. Only when we can sit down together with each other in complete trust interdependent and independent--will we feel the heartbeat of this simple practice and will we begin to take care of the living and the dead.

It's Always Something

Chikudo-Jerome Peterson has been a zen monk for many years and a great supporter of and mentor to HSZC.

"Motivation, commitment, and understanding that there will always be problems"--these are three things necessary for being a zen student according to Chikudo-Jerome Peterson, speaking to the HSZC sangha on a Sunday morning in May. Jerome responded to a student's question about personal problems as obstacles to practice. "There are always problems whether you sit or not. Are the problems you have when practicing the same type of problems? If you're living a middle class life, your problems are paying the rent, putting gas in the car.

"If you practice," said Jerome developing his theme, "you are thinking of success that goes beyond your idea of worldly success. How close a friend have you made of yourself? A lot of people don't know themselves very well because they are afraid of what they might find out. They are never alone or in silence. They come home, turn on the T.V. and only respond to external stimuli. Everyone opens up in different ways because we don't share the same karma. Most people try to take an ostrich view of life. They don't want to know about their 'innermost request'. They just want to deal with life on the level of the price of gas. They don't want to know about their inner self--don't want to deal with it. Once you become aware of something there is the possibility of change--and your whole life can be completely transformed."

Issan's contribution was this..."Since coming to Hartford Street, the more I open up, the more problems I have, but it's not something you fix. The more I practice, the more I am aware of suffering, but that is the joy of life. It can be very painful to practice because you're aware of more angles and sharp edges in life and there's no escaping it."

The 10 Oxherding Pictures

Sets out.
the apparent element. traces.
a deeper trace.
espied &
attended
absorbed.
forgotten.
a deeper forgetting.
a song of nothing.
enters the town

Rick London

"I'm Ready for My Close-Up Now, Mr. DeMille"

Sharon Kehoe has been volunteering at the Maitri Home and Hospice for People with AIDS for over a year now. Her smile can light up the room--it's difficult to maintain a bad mood in her presence. She practices Vipassana meditation and studies Theravadan Buddhism with Dr. Rina Sircar, her teacher, a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies where Sharon is working on a Master's degree in East-West psychology. Describing her thesis project (for which she was awarded a Rockefeller Scholarship Grant from the Center for the Study of Science and Spirituality) Sharon says, "I'm making a videotape of life at the Hartford Street Zen Center Maitri Hospice, which cares for people with AIDS. What is the experience--physically and psychologically--of people who have AIDS? This is a medical model. What is the spiritual experience of people in a Zen Buddhist environment? This is a spiritual or religious model." She continued, "It is my opinion that the Hartford Street Zen Center Maitri Hospice does an excellent job of integrating the two models. And I would like to share it with others by offering this video. It would show the dialogue between, and the integration of science and spirit in action."

Sharon's own response to the AIDS epidemic developed out of an experience of several friends of hers who have faced AIDS personally. As Sharon explains, "Some view AIDS with pain, anger and horror. Some view it as a stepping stone to accelerated spiritual growth and transformation. Others are already dead. My original intent was simply to help them. This has expanded to other endeavors. I am writing my M.A. thesis on AIDS, focussing on the spiritual aspects of it. What I would like the film to show is, quite simply, what goes on at the Maitri Hospice. People are living there, people are dying there. There are many visitors: health care workers, volunteers, family, friends and zen students who come to listen to lectures or practice meditation in the zendo. The atmosphere is that of Maitri, hence, the name of the hospice. Maitri is a sanskrit word which means that which softens one's heart or the state of being a true friend--the sincere wish for the welfare and genuine happiness of all beings. Hopefully, the effect of this on persons with AIDS, as well as on all concerned, would be evident in the video. The point would be to let the participants speak for themselves, either verbally or in action. It will be not simply interviews, but rather a presentation of a (zen) way of life and death."

As Maitri Hospice director Steve Allen put it, "The fundamental point for us is how we take care of what is in front of us, how we take care of the immediate present. Issan and I, and the members of HSZC have not gone out of our way to establish

this encounter with death. Death has come to our door and found it open. When we can deal with that, we can also deal with our other human relationships--our relationship to society and to our own religious life, our own awakening."

Sharon hopes to use her research and the film for educational purposes and fundraising for AIDS and the Maitri Hospice. She says that her primary concern is to help alleviate fear. She added, "Many fears will be addressed by the film: (society's) fear of people who have AIDS, fear of what it might be like for one to have AIDS, fear of dying, and even fear of living. This brings up the underlying fundamental fear: fear of change. How can we grow in understanding through learning to give up some of our long held assumptions about the nature of science and spirituality for example... the belief, so prevalent in Western culture, that they are unrelated."

If anyone would like to share their thoughts or experience with Sharon on the subjects mentioned above, she would be happy to speak with you--leave a note for her with your phone number at HSZC.

Niki Rothman

In Memoriam

On April 5 Maitri Hospice board of trustees chair Al Schaaf died after a brief AIDS related illness. Al's guidance was instrumental in organizing and giving direction to the Maitri Hospice Program. His contributions to the lives of the people of San Francisco were manifold. As director of personnel for the San Francisco Department of Parks and Recreation, president of the San Francisco Council of Human Resources, and president of Gay Games II, he worked diligently for human rights. He loved music and was a member of the board of directors of the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. His memorial service, held in the band shell at Golden Gate Park, was attended by many, including community leaders. City Attorney Louise Renne praised Al as "A really good friend, truly one of the kindest, genuinely sharing people in the City." She went on to say Al was a visionary in hospice work and that "If the world was comprised of more people like Al Schaaf, it would truly be a better world." His dedication to serving his community will continue to be an inspiration.

Derek Frederick, a Maitri resident, died on Sunday April 9. Derrick was a professional hospice attendant for many years, both in Seattle and in San Francisco. He was a kindly, intelligent man who enjoyed cooking and entertaining friends. He was also an accomplished photographer. We are grateful to have known him.

Towards a New Theology of AIDS

"Is AIDS the Wrath of God?"

Issan recently requested that the poem he quotes from below, "Please Call Me By My True Names" by Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hahn, be included in the newsletter. Although it is now two years later, Issan's accompanying message of recognition and reconciliation still speaks to daily life concerns framed by the reality of AIDS--what would it mean to respond with compassion? The following is a transcript of Issan's comments during the Interfaith AIDS Conference held at Congregation Emanuel, San Francisco in 1987. "Is AIDS the wrath of God?" was given as a pre-assigned question to which the panelists were asked to respond. Issan's contribution is as follows.

Thich Nhat Hahn is a Vietnamese zen master, an exponent of peace, teaching the Buddhist principle or aspect of compassion. I would like to begin by reading this poem:

Please Call Me by My True Names

Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.

Look deeply: I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch
to be a tiny bird, with the wings still fragile,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding in a stone.

I still arrive in order to laugh and to cry,
in order to fear and to hope,
the rhythm of my heart is the birth and
death of all that are alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the
surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when spring comes,
arrives in time to eat the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the
clear water of a pond,
and I am also the grass snake who,
approaching in silence,
feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly
weapons to Uganda.

I am the 12 year-year old girl, refugee
on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean after
being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo, with
plenty of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his
"debt of blood" to my people,
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.

My joy is like the spring, so warm it makes
flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it
fills up the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and my laughs
at once,
so that I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door to my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion.

Thich Nhat Hahn

"Is AIDS the wrath of God?" I take this discussion very seriously, but I refuse to take the question seriously out of respect to Christians. AIDS is not the wrath of God...nor is syphilis, the common cold, mosquitos, lice, house flies, or Ivory soap. Let us back up and examine our tendency to think of sickness, old age and death as unfortunate, much less a punishment. If sickness, old age and death are unfortunate then so is birth.

Let me read to you a paragraph from the book The Buddha's Life Story and Basic Teachings:

"Not only was the Buddha consistent in his lack of interest in matters of monkish dress and abode, he was also disinclined to engage in learned argumentation on such debatable and basically unsolvable matters as the nature of divinity, first causes, life after death and similar subjects. One of the most apt illustrations of this invariably pragmatic position can be found in his replies to a disciple named Malunkyaputta, who had been striving in vain to engage the master in learned dialectic of the kind presumably then favored among Indian gurus. In some irritation because of the lack of response on the Teacher's part, this monk, with his restive, overactive, impatient mind, finally remarked that he would either get some answers to his persistent queries or leave the order."

"To this ultimatum, Buddha replied in effect that such an attitude could only be compared to that of a man who, having been shot with a poisoned arrow, said, 'I will not remove this arrow, call a physician, or heal my wound until I have ascertained who shot the arrow, what tribe he belonged to, how the arrow was made and so on.' Or perhaps, to a man in a burning house who declares, 'I will not leave the house until I find who set the fire in the first place.'"

The mission statement for this conference says, "We wish to develop, increase and continue an active and compassionate response to those affected by AIDS and ARC." As a Buddhist, compassion is the key word. The Bodhisattva of compassion is Kanzeon, also known as Avalokiteshvara or in Chinese, Kwan Yin. This Bodhisattva is not someone outside of ourselves. Kanzeon is the Bodhisattva who deeply penetrates the sounds of the world. Deeply penetrates means to *become* the sounds of the world.

What are the sounds of the world? Not just those that we hear, but also what we see, what we think, what we feel; those are the sounds of the world--Kanzeon. A person, a Bodhisattva who sees, hears, feels, *is* the sounds of the world.

We chant the sutra to Kanzeon called "Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo". This is the sutra for prolonging life. When someone is sick, we chant this sutra for them. What does that mean, prolonging life? What is life? We are this very moment and this very moment contains everything: past, present and future; everything. There is no end, no beginning, and being so, we have prolonged life; we have eliminated the distinction between life and death. How? By realizing that we are infinite life and infinite death.

Is AIDS the wrath of God? ...I am saying AIDS is God.

Towards a theology of AIDS; what is our personal, individual responsibility?

How can we enjoy all of life in every moment whether or not it is the way we most prefer?... intend to live the life we are living?...come to know how wide, deep and strong our life is? ...know and experience space as something that connects us, not separates us?

It is time to get a hold of your life and shake it! Shake off the delusions that make us hear the sounds of the world instead of being them.

"So I can hear all my cries and my laughs
at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion."

Because I am a zen priest, living in a small zen center in the gay community, I have performed many funerals for people who have died of AIDS. In a Buddhist funeral we speak to the person who is dead, wishing them well and giving them our energy and caring. Sometimes people say, "How can you speak to someone who is dead?" If we are open to it, we have bonds with each other that are more important than life and death.

Ah, the original face has no birth or death...

Words are silly, but they are trying to express something; each one not so good an expression.

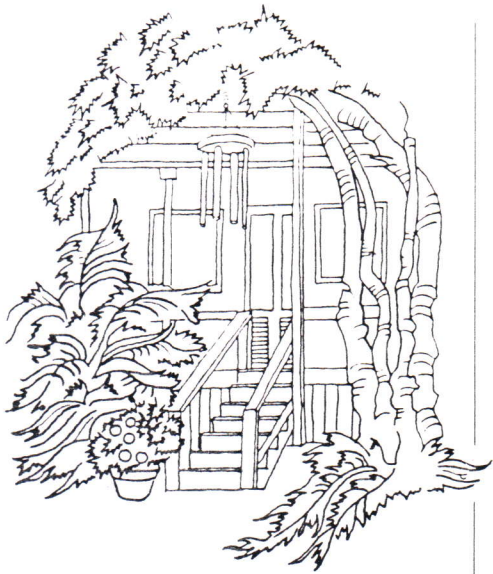
Thank you.

Maitri Hospice Update

We are now home to six PWA's and are receiving 24 hour attendant care from the Visiting Nurses Association of San Francisco. Hospice residents and zen students seem to have settled down together and formed a family. There is a very warm feeling--Hartford Street and Maitri have opened up and blended their energies. These days everyone seems to be working to take care of each other, as if there has been a necessary crystallization of good intentions into cooperative activity.

According to Maitri director Steve Allen, one of Maitri's major goals is "to respond directly to the AIDS epidemic itself. To show that a group of people with no funds can do something real--on their own. They don't have to be a hospital or a big organization. The second goal is, once we've done it, to be a model for other small groups. To show them that to care for and house otherwise homeless AIDS patients is a realizable task, that we're doing it and here's how. It's an uphill battle because it's hard for people to believe."

Our biggest problem remains fund raising. "Our proposals to grantmaking foundations have so far been turned down. It's difficult to fight the system. The way of thinking tends to move toward hospitals as the prevailing model for an AIDS hospice, but there's an inherent difference between a hospital and a home. It's discouraging, but I hope that in the future we'll be funded. We have to prove first that we can do it. So far we have only received money from friends and people who know about us", Steve said.



Being Sick Practice

My intention has been to continue my training at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. My body, specifically my back, has a different teaching for me; because of a severe back condition, I'm not able to practice the way I'd like. Instead I practice the way I can.

How can we practice when our bodies no longer function the way they once did? ...when we are affected by ARC, by the opportunistic diseases of AIDS, by cancer, or by any other sickness? This is a question we hold in ourselves. This is a question that we make our own each day, each moment...And how can I practice today with this sickness, this condition? What is the life that appears at this moment?

I do not pretend that my present back condition is like dying of AIDS. But I'm beginning to understand that death is my everyday life. As my teacher, Issan-sensei, is so fond of saying..."I feel wonderful--it's just my body that's dying."

We are so fortunate to have this teaching not just as an idea, but as our very lives.

David Sunseri

Small Verses

Hartford Street Zen Center and the Maitri Home and Hospice for People with AIDS exist only through the help and support of members and friends. This generosity makes it possible for HSZC to exist as a Buddhist practice center and to continue working to provide an environment of service and care for people with AIDS.

David Bullock was elected director of HSZC at a HSZC board of directors meeting held April 23, following a discussion on the need for creating the position of director due to the increased complexity of life at HSZC and our expanded responsibilities. He is currently planning a late summer social event to benefit HSZC. Best wishes for success in your new position, David.

Our heartfelt thanks to registered nurse Jan Clark and Licensed Clinical Social Worker Wendy Kahn, who come to us from VNA. Their caring and expertise have been indispensable in helping us to structure the hospice program and in providing professional medical and social services.

Thanks to Bob Gordon for facilitating the April Maitri evening showing of the film "Exploring the Heart of Healing" featuring hospice advocates Steven Levine and Ram Dass.

Thanks to May Maitri evening speaker and HSZC board of directors member Chikudo-Jerome Peterson who discussed his experiences practicing in a zen monastery in Korea during this past year. Welcome back, Jerome.

Do you have time on Saturday morning to help out in the kitchen? A cookie baker and general prep person are needed. Kitchen volunteering shifts can be arranged for your convenience. Please speak to David Bullock or Angelique.

There will be an annual meeting to elect members to the HSZC board of directors and officers of HSZC in September. Please check the bulletin board or call later in the summer for the exact date. All members are invited.

Appreciation goes to Teller Thomas and Alexej Janjatovic, professional bodyworkers who have been volunteering their healing skills to provide massages to Maitri residents and staff.

The May 6 Maitri auction and dance benefit was a great success due to the kindness and generosity of many members of HSZC and friends of the Maitri Hospice Program who gave freely of their time and energy. Especially deserving of acknowledgement are--Gloria Simoneaux, Angelique Farrow, Kijun-Steve Allen, Alain Briant, Doug Vinnell, Alex Edwards, Susan Isaacson Carroll, Clare Young-Wood, Bob Brittin, Lane Olson, Shunko-Michael Jamvold, Peter Goetz, Bob Gordon, Alexej Janjatovic, Don Cooper, Bluma Kaplan, Ken Ireland, Mimi and Peter Vandersterre, Tommy Guerrero, Dahlia Kamisar, David Cohn, David Bullock, Del Carlson, Annie Somerville, Maria Guitron, John Cole, Michael Gallagher, Olga, Kevin & Gary, Tris and friends. The San Francisco Zen Center including Greens Restaurant, Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, and Green Gulch Farm generously supported our efforts in so many ways--from donating vacation weekends to providing refreshments. And to everyone who donated goods and services, skills and support, and to those who attended--a grateful thanks and gassho from all of us at HSZC and the Maitri Hospice Program.

Diane DiPrima will be teaching a poetry class at HSZC beginning in September. For details call Angelique at 861-6779.

Issan will be at the Lama Foundation over the July 4th weekend helping to lead the Fourth Annual Gay and Lesbian Spirituality Conference. Issan will then spend a week at the Western Zen Center in Santa Fe and a week in Crestone, Colorado studying and completing Transmission with his teacher, Zentatsu-Richard Baker-roshi. He will then lecture in Santa Fe before returning to San Francisco.

Issan and Kijun-Steve Allen spoke at the Buddhism and Psychotherapy conference held at San Francisco State University in May.

Also in May, Zenshin-Philip Whalen travelled to Santa Fe where he lectured and conducted a poetry seminar. In June, Zenshin joins Baker-roshi in Europe to help lead a sesshin. In July he will be in Santa Fe for Issan's Transmission ceremony.

In July, Kijun-Steve Allen and Angelique Farrow will be visiting with Thich Nhat Hahn at Plum Village in France.

Issan, Steve Allen and Joan Halifax will be leading a mindfulness retreat at the Ojai Foundation in September.

If you have looked out any of the back windows recently, you will see what looks like a war zone. A plan for a garden has been developed, but the man woman-power to implement it successfully is lacking. HSZC director David Bullock notes, "We have to do a lot of work before planting can begin, and if we do not plant soon we will not be able to have a garden this year." The garden committee is planning an ongoing series of work days and people can drop in at any time.

To find out the the next work date, please call Alexej at 626-5224.

Special Events Calendar

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| Sunday | July 2 | One Day Sitting, 5:00 am to 5:00 pm |
| Tuesday | July 18 | Full Moon Bodhisattva Ceremony, 6:40 pm |
| Sunday | August 6 | One Day Sitting, 5:00 am to 5:00 pm |
| Thursday | August 17 | Full Moon Bodhisattva Ceremony, 6:40 pm |
| Sunday | Sept. 3 | One Day Sitting, 5:00 am to 5:00 pm |
| Friday | Sept. 15 | Full Moon Bodhisattva Ceremony, 6:40 pm |

Maitri evenings will be cancelled for the summer and resume in October.

Weekly Schedule

Sunday: Informal period of zazen 9:00 am, Lecture 10:00 am, followed by discussion and tea. The morning ends with 15 minute soji (temple cleaning), donation requested.

Monday: Zazen orientation and instruction for newcomers, 5:30 pm. If you cannot attend at this time please call us. Koan study class with Kijun-Steve Allen, 8:00 pm.

Tuesday: "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" class with Zenshin-Philip Whalen, 8:00 pm.

Fees: The fee for both courses is \$5.00 per evening. You can drop in for single classes without pre-registering. Your tuition is a donation to HSZC.

Dinner is open to the public on Tuesday evenings after zazen. There is a \$3.00 donation.

Wednesday: Shanti Support Group, 7:00 pm

Thursday: Shanti Support Group, 7:00 pm

HSZC newsletter welcomes submissions of poetry, articles of interest from our readers and art work, including calligraphy. Deadline for the next newsletter is September 1. Please include your phone number with your contribution. Also, anyone wishing to write about a specific HSZC event (such as a Maitri Evening) should speak to Niki at 861-6352.

Daily Schedule

Monday through Friday:

Zazen 6:00 am
Interval 6:25 am
Zazen 6:30 am
Service 6:55 am

Zazen 6:00 pm
Service 6:40 pm

Zendo Protocol

Please plan your schedule so that you allow time to arrive in the zendo five minutes before the beginning of zazen. Be as quiet as possible and walk very softly, bowing as you enter the sitting area and when crossing in front of the altar. It is suggested that you wear dark, loose fitting clothing and that you do not wear socks while sitting. Once you are seated and the bell has rung, please make your best effort not to move or make noise.